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SUBJECT: PSYCHEDELIC PURPLE VERSUS THE LUSTER OF GOLD

¶1. SUMMARY: The discovery of 24 new animal species by Surinamese and American scientists, including a frog with psychedelic purple markings, has given Suriname world-wide attention, as reported in over 150 newspapers and journals. These articles have also highlighted the threat to Suriname's highly diverse ecosystem from mercury pollution caused by illegal gold mining. The study that led to the discoveries was carried out by Conservation International (CI) and was paid for, by bauxite mining companies Suralco and BHP-Billiton, who are looking into the environmental impact of mining in their concession area. Community conscious Suralco looks to be a good corporate citizen, while illegal gold miners continue to pollute the area. END SUMMARY

24 NEW SPECIES OF WILDLIFE

¶2. On June 4, CI scientists reported they had discovered 24 new species of wildlife in the remote plateaus of eastern Suriname, including a frog with fluorescent purple markings, other amphibians, and fish and insects. The CI scientists had partnered with the major two bauxite mining companies in Suriname, BHP-Billiton and Suralco, who sought to understand potentially harmful impacts on the environment from mining. In 2005, CI's Center for Applied Biodiversity Science conducted a Rapid Assessment Program (RAP) Expedition in the eastern mountains of Suriname. The report that RAP leader Leeanne Alonso, Ph.D. presented to the Government of Suriname (GOS) on June 4 details the invaluable biodiversity the team discovered during its expedition. Alonso said, "This is a totally unexplored area: lots of new species, with many more to be found. Our study will be a vital component in determining how to promote economic development in Suriname while protecting the nation's most valuable natural assets."

THREATENED BY MINING?

¶3. CI-Suriname Executive Director Ambassador Wim Udenhout told media, "Where current economic imperatives dictate mining, our responsibility is to ensure that operations are kept within the bounds of our benchmarks." In other words, it is imperative for mining companies to understand potentially harmful impacts on the environment. In his introductory remarks on June 4, Suralco's Managing Director, Warren Pedersen, emphasized his company's responsibility and respect for the environment. He noted that neither mining companies, nor environmentalists, need be opponents; good business and conservation can both be accomplished provided they are managed "in the right way". The company is the largest employer in Suriname and is known for its efforts to be a good corporate citizen in Suriname, for example by providing humanitarian assistance to the community. Still, while Suralco may be a responsible player, Suriname's pristine forests are increasingly

threatened by small scale, illegal gold mining. The miners use mercury to extract gold from soil, and it subsequently ends up in the streams and rivers, degrading water quality and damaging fragile ecosystems. Small scale gold mining has already affected two unprotected plateaus surveyed during the RAP expedition, 80 miles south of Suriname's capitol, Paramaribo.

¶4. COMMENT: With nearly 20 percent of the world's water running through the region, there are few places like Suriname left in the world. Suriname and its neighbors are home to the largest expanse of undisturbed rain forest on the planet. The discovery of 24 new species as reported on MSNBC, FOX, and the Associated Press, among others, has probably given this obscure country more international attention than it has received in years. Biologists and other conservationists are flocking to the region.

¶5. COMMENT CONT'D: Suriname hopes that its rain forests (and what lies beneath them) can fulfill two often contradictory tasks: remain an international treasure generating eco-tourism dollars, while also earning mining revenues through resource extraction. In order to manage this balancing act, Suriname must not simply pay lip service to conservation on the one hand, while tolerating illegal environmentally unsustainable mining practices on the other. Although Suriname's fluorescent purple frogs reached the world stage thanks to CI's RAP report, Post doubts that the GOS has the political will or the ability to protect them, should they have the bad fortune to hop into an illegal gold mining operation. Post will remain in contact with CI-Suriname to gauge its perspective and the dynamics of mining and conservation in Suriname. END COMMENT

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